

Strength

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He did not need a mystical genjutsu or an overpowering ninjutsu to be victorious, he just needed the strength to believe. He worked hard, battled until his body nearly exploded. Deep down, Lee was proud of himself. One-shot.

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How long was he out? Days? Months? It certainly felt like years. Lee's charcoal eyes blinked to life, and he said nothing. The backlash of his weariness hit him not instantly, but shortly as he slowly craned his neck to find a single flower. The yellow rose stood rather limp in a fresh, cylindrical vase, and the water seemed new as well. It was like he was waking up to a completely new life.

Rock Lee sat up, wincing as he did to gaze upon the rose. He wondered who would care so much to deliver it, to nurture it into a vibrant, healthy bloom. Lee's head slowly cocked, gently brushing his fingers against the soft flower, and he gasped as a single petal suddenly plucked off in his grasp. Lee rolled his shoulders back, but cringed and fell back into the bed.

Pain seemed to rupture from every bone in his spine. Gaara, he certainly did a number on him. He remembered the battle decisively, recalling each hit, sand blast, each hellish wave of those grainy knives jabbing into him. Even by using everything he had, everything he was physically capable of doing, Lee still failed.

Lee groaned, rubbing his forehead and sighed. Why? Why did he have to be the failure? He was born with ninjutsu or genjutsu skills, technically becoming the weakest one of the academy. Lee had no talents, relying on taijutsu. It was his only hope of becoming a passionate, great ninja. His only dream, but could it still be finalized after suffering such a humiliating loss?

Everything about Lee ached, splitting through waves of despair along his young body. He could not pinpoint of single spot of relief. His leg and arm, shattered. Spine, quite possibly torn and shredded.

All of the muscles in his body felt like someone stretched them apart mercilessly until they ripped apart. Lee experimentally flexed his fingers, finding them still working and felt a smile creep along his face.

He could still move. He could still fight. At least it was a start.

Lee noticed a crutch leaning against his bed. Gazing at it, his shock expanded throughout his body when he realized his leg was wrapped up in bandages to keep the ligaments intact. Snatching the crutch, he swiveled himself out of bed, careful not to upset his fractured leg. Placing his weight onto the crutch, Lee grunted and forced himself out of bed. Gasping when he managed to stand, Lee glanced down at the blue bathrobe he was adorned in. Hesitantly, Lee began walking around, leaning on the crutch for utmost support. Once he reached the door, he slowly opened it and peered out into the plain hallway of the Leaf Village's hospital.

It was his first time awake since his battle with Gaara, and it was like he teleported through time. Everything looked different, but he wondered if by being there, it meant he was subjected to the torment of his peers. He was the failure, the genin who could not beat the vicious Sand ninja. Even though two others lost in beating his older siblings, Gaara proved to be the biggest threat. Since he was the best, Lee thought that by winning, he would prove himself worthy in everyone's eyes, especially Might Guy and Sakura.

Yet, he lost.

Lee hung his head as he walked, brushing past nurses who paused to gaze at him. He ensured no eye contact with anyone, but made certain that not anyone who could recognize would. Lee wanted no more humiliation from the terror he faced, and how he bravely fought, but in the end, he was left with nothing except for a broken body and streaming blood guzzling down his mouth and limbs.

Opening the door to the world, Lee stepped outside. Instantly, he took in the fresh wind, watching the leaves ripple and crinkle as they

blew past. One landed on his shoulder, and he gently grasped it. It was so frail and weak, a dark, pale orange in color. Easily, it broke apart between Lee's fingers. Gasping in shock, he allowed the wind to steal the fragmented particles.

Lee gazed towards the sky, fresh and blue, much like his robe. Clouds lazily passed by, bright and white, just the way he liked them. Lee stepped onto the grass, and it tickled his toes as his feet crunched down onto them. He was never so happy than to feel the blissfulness of nature embrace him, comforting him in his time of peril. During his battle, Lee thought he would never see the world again. Gaara was so intense that he truly believed he would actually die for his nindo, which he would be proud to do.

Lee sighed, sitting down and lied back. Still, he was happy just to breathe, to see, to hear nature whispering into his ears like a mother murmuring to her newborn. He was joyful to be alive, plain and simple. He had another chance, one to prove himself to the world. Just by surviving Gaara's assault proved that he was a worthy ninja. He faced Gaara and nearly won, something no one could ever accomplish!

As he remained there, Lee thought. He did not need a mystical genjutsu or an overpowering ninjutsu to be victorious, he just needed the strength to believe. He worked hard, battled until his body nearly exploded. Deep down, Lee was proud of himself. Even with the heavy loss hanging over his head like a stormy cloud, Lee was victorious in his mind. He nearly won.

The next time I see Gaara, I will defeat him! Lee vowed, clenching his free fist. *In order to do that, I must start training immediately! Everyone will see that I am a powerful ninja with only the ability to use taijutsu! I am Rock Lee, the Leaf Village's Handsome Beast, and I will roar! You will all see!*